

THE SAFER STROLL PROJECT, A DOCUMENTARY

by Terry Peters

Perhaps our first offence is to presume that we know what she's going through.

Even in our sophisticated, modern world, women remain vulnerable to the many forms, of gender inequality. Women have the voice and the vote to create cultural change, but imbalances still exist. Pay inequities, unequal responsibility for child-rearing and household maintenance, an unequal representation in business, and positions of power are some examples. Jobs traditionally performed by women are still valued and paid less than those done by men. A 1980 U.N. Report declared that women do two-thirds of the world's work (both paid and unpaid), receive 10% of the world's income, and own 1% of the world's property.

The exploitation of women's work expands to include the exploitation of women's bodies, which are sexualized daily in movies, television, and advertising. An unwelcome leer, remark or touch is a form of sexual harassment

that combines gender inequality and exploitation, and all too often goes unpunished. Inequality and exploitation also combine to form a worse threat, that of sexual violence -sexual activity within the context of physical violence. Date rape in a college dorm room is sexual violence... and so is a sex worker being raped and beaten in an alleyway. Violence against women is a very real threat, and if any



A panel of experts answered questions and shared their experiences at the International Women's Day launch of the Stater Stroll Documentary.

woman can be vulnerable in her own home, imagine what it's like for a woman who has no home.

Homeless people face far more violence than the general population.

Among them, the most vulnerable are women, particularly those who are involved in sex work. Research published in the Street Health Report 2007 states that more than 1 in 5 marginalized women had been raped, and an alarming 43% had been repeated victims of sexual harassment or assault, some more times than they could count. According to the Toronto Police Sex Crimes Unit, 4 or 5 sex workers are assaulted every single night. A Canadian commission found that the death rate of women in sex work was 40 times higher than that of the general population. Recently, the Ontario Court of Appeal made groundbreaking changes to laws surrounding sex work to make it safer, but the daily reality for the women involved remains dangerous. Our first priority in addressing this issue is not about right and wrong, it is about finding a way to keep these vulnerable women safe.

The Safer Stroll Project responds to the violence, stigma, and marginalization that sex workers often experience.

Launched in 2008, this collaboration between Street Health, the Bad Date Coalition, and the Regent Park Community Health Centre is aimed at increasing the capacity of sex workers and social service agencies to address violence in this community. The program trains peers support workers to defend

themselves, perform street outreach, facilitate women's drop-ins, and to share their wisdom and experience with others.

On Friday March 9, 2012 a standing-room-only crowd gathered at the All Saints Church, in celebration of International Women's Day, for the premiere of a gripping documentary about the Safer Stroll Project. A panel of experts including a social worker and women's rights activist, 2 sex workers, a representative from the Bad Date Coalition, and member of the Toronto Police Special Victims Unit answered questions and led a stirring dialog about the issues facing women on the street. Attendees were able to applaud, network, and learn from the Safer Stroll graduates who did not shy away from the camera, or from the issues being discussed.

In the past three years, 25 peer support workers have graduated from the Safer Stroll Project, empowered with safety strategies, a sense of belonging, hope for the future, and an ability to share all of this with others. These graduates have initiated 1,878 contacts with sex workers, made 3,988 referrals to community resources, and delivered 52 educational workshops to community organizations. One graduate,

continued on back page >

STREET HEALTH NURSE, ANNE MARIE BATTEN SHARES HER EXPERIENCE AS A PROJECT WINTER SURVIVAL VOLUNTEER.

by Anne Marie Batten

On Saturday Jan. 21, 2012 The Bargains Group distributed 3100 survival kits through their annual program, Project Winter Survival to agencies and outreach programs who support individuals facing homelessness in the Greater Toronto Area. Street Health was given 100 kits and sleeping bags through the project to distribute to our clients in need.

Each kit contained: toiletries, towel and face-cloth, hat, mitts, scarf, deck of cards, granola bar and bottle of water, and sleeping bag.

As a Project Winter Survival volunteer and an outreach nurse at Street Health, I was asked to lead a group of volunteers downtown Toronto, searching for people who needed our help. This fantastic group of volunteers walked the streets on a very cold afternoon and distributed kits and sleeping bags with a smile. Each person we met was so grateful for this assistance. It was an incredible experience to see so many caring people helping to make this day happen.

Although this winter was milder overall than in previous years, it is still difficult for many of us to comprehend how anyone could sleep outdoors. This was a discussion that occurred frequently during our day.



Project Winter Survival founder, Jody Steinhauer and Street Health nurse, Anne Marie Batten prepare to distribute sleeping bags to the homeless.

We talked about the risks people face such as frostbite injuries, hypothermia, and pneumonia. We also discussed how many who are sleeping outdoors may have other health conditions such as poor nutritional status, diabetes, impaired circulation and other ailments which can increase their overall risk.

These kits not only keep people warm and provide some basic comfort, but they are also a means of communication for outreach workers. When we approach someone who may be wary of our assistance...we have something to offer. This can help us gain trust and to establish rapport with that person. As outreach workers, we know that with some who are sleeping outdoors it may take a few visits for us to succeed in building a trusting relationship. From there, we can work toward getting that person to a safe place such as a shelter or a rooming house.

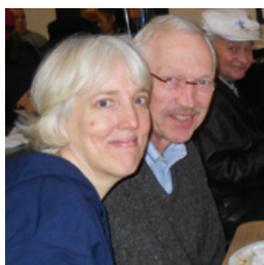
Distribution of sleeping bags and other outreach items is one more important way Street Health nurses have an opportunity to make a difference to the vulnerable among us. This winter, in addition to the kits and sleeping bags donated by Project Winter Survival, Street Health distributed over 400 sleeping bags, hats, mitts and scarves to those in need.

OUR PROGRAMS & SERVICES

- Nursing Outreach
- Mental Health Support
- I.D. Replacement and Storage
- Harm Reduction
- Advocacy
- Research
- Education

IT'S A PARTY, AND EVERYONE'S INVITED

On February 21, 2012 Street Health proudly celebrated our 26th Anniversary. Every birthday deserves a party and we threw a festive one at the Toronto Friendship Centre, located at Dundas and Sherbourne. We see this annual celebration as an opportunity to share a happy time with our clients and the community we serve. More than 300 clients and friends joined us for music, fellowship, and a nutritious filling meal. Guests danced, ate, laughed, and were able to forget, if only briefly, that life can be very tough. It's



still pretty chilly outside, and each of our valued clients left with a warm cozy Street Health sweatshirt.

We are always grateful to the

Jewell Catering Company for continuing its generous annual tradition of providing the hot, delicious meal. We also thank Loblaws for donating the sunny spring flowers, and the volunteers at the Friendship Centre for helping to set up and clean up afterward. Amanda Robertson, Street Health's

Fundraising Manager, did all the heavy-lifting to organize this special event and we truly appreciate her hard work ensuring that a good time was had by all! Happy Birthday Street Health!



Thank you Jewell Catering for providing a delicious meal - Happy Birthday Street Health!

YOU CAN HELP... BY SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

From time to time, news reporters ask us to contribute to articles that shed light on the daily struggles that our clients endure. We are pleased to participate in these interviews as part of our mandate to assist in educating others about the impact that severe poverty has on our clients' quality of life. We also see this as an opportunity to clear up misconceptions, stereotypes, and prejudices that have the potential for the further subjugation of our clients.

There are a number of popular misconceptions about homeless people that need to be addressed.

There are those who suspect that all homeless people buy crack cocaine with their spare change; that they are, as a result of mental health issues, inept at handling or responsibly spending the few dollars in their pockets; or that the homeless are predatory "entrepreneurs", out to make a quick buck rather than getting a real job. We encourage you to help dispel these misconceptions by replacing assumptions with facts and statistics, by relying on the decades of research that Street Health and other agencies have conducted, and by realizing that perpetuating these myths actually worsens both the experience of homelessness and the barriers to escaping it.

While it is true that a large number of Toronto's homeless population suffer from mental health concerns and addictions, these souls account for less than half of the homeless people on our downtown streets. This fact is statistically supported by the research of Dr. Stephen Hwang, of St. Michael's Hospital, entitled: "Drug problems among homeless individuals in Toronto, Canada: prevalence, drugs of choice, and relation to health status", which included the experience of almost 1,200 men and women at homeless shelters and meal programs in Toronto.

Obstacles to improving economic circumstances for someone who is not housed are excessive, and perpetuating

the myth that the majority of homeless people are addicts can cause great harm to the people who need our help most.

Employers, landlords, legislators, police officers, hospital staff, and the media who believe these types of misrepresentations create barriers to employment, housing, healthcare, support, and personal safety for otherwise deserving people, and their families, as a result of unwarranted prejudices.

It is true that many homeless people suffer with various mental health issues, depression being the most prevalent. Some of them developed their state as a result of the living conditions surrounding their poverty and homelessness, and others ended up on the streets due to the repercussions of their circumstance. However, the fact is that one in five Canadian's suffer from some form of mental health issue. The vast majority of people impacted are functioning and are not dangerous to others. This holds true for those who live in houses, and for those with mental health issues who live on our streets.

Once again, popular misconceptions and scare tactics harm our clients and prevent them from finding stable jobs and homes. To quote the Canadian Mental Health Association website,

"...the stigma experienced by people with a mental illness can be more destructive than the illness itself."

It's time we all started dispelling the myths surrounding mental health, regardless of the socioeconomic background of the sufferer.

The idea that homeless people would rather panhandle than work is another very harmful untruth, which implies that these supposed "entrepreneurs" ended up on the street by choice. In fact, many people end up unemployed and/or homeless by no fault of their own: injury, old age, disability, job loss, and the scarcity of affordable housing have left numerous

THERE ARE A NUMBER OF POPULAR MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT HOMELESS PEOPLE THAT NEED TO BE ADDRESSED.

"...THE STIGMA EXPERIENCED BY PEOPLE WITH A MENTAL ILLNESS CAN BE MORE DESTRUCTIVE THAN THE ILLNESS ITSELF."

people with no option but to lose their homes and live in shelters, temporary housing, or on the street. Once there, (and often due to untrue stereotypes), it is quite difficult to find employment without a fixed address; a telephone; access to a computer; or access to compassionate support. Layer on top of this a lack of security, increased stress, and fewer resources and you can imagine how difficult it is for many of our clients to rise above this level of poverty.

These are, despite over 20 years of research, but a few examples of the enduring misconceptions in our society that continue to endanger the people Street Health works to serve and protect. Your help in setting the record straight and raising the consciousness of your friends and colleagues will go a long way in improving the living conditions, and future possibilities, of the many individuals and families living on our streets.

THANK YOU TO OUR 2011-2012 CORPORATE AND FOUNDATION MAJOR DONORS!

[Ben & Hilda Katz Foundation](#)
[Canadian Auto Workers \(CAW\)](#)
[CIBC](#)
[Crestview Investments](#)
[EJLB Foundation](#)
[Fairlawn Avenue United Church](#)
[R.M. Farewell](#)
[George Lunan Foundation](#)
[Greater Toronto Apartment Association](#)
[Green Shield Canada Foundation](#)
[Grey Sisters of the Immaculate Conception](#)
[J.P. Bickell Foundation](#)
[Jackman Foundation](#)
[McCarthy Tetrault Foundation](#)
[Paloma Foundation](#)
[Realtors Care Foundation](#)
[Sisters of Service](#)
[Sisters of St. Joseph for the Diocese of Toronto](#)
[Sprott Foundation](#)
[St. Andrew's United Church](#)
[St. Mark's Presbyterian Church](#)
[The Georgina Foundation](#)
[The Mclean Foundation](#)
[The Rainbow Foundation](#)
[The Redemptorists](#)
[The St. Andrew's Society of Toronto](#)
[The Wynford Group](#)
[Timothy Eaton Memorial Church](#)
[United Way](#)
[Visitation Province](#)
[Wexford Heights United Church](#)

< continued from page 1

Brandi, feels that, "...it's such a pleasure to be on the face of this earth doing something positive."

Sadly, Brandi is one of the few women who are able to access this program. Originally financed by Status of Women Canada (a federal government organization) and then the City of Toronto, the value and success of this program is undoubtedly recognized. Yet, recently all funding for this important project was lost – leaving Street Health to scrape together bear minimum funding to keep the project alive.

Street Health's Mary Kay MacVicar, program co-ordinator, laments that the number of women who apply greatly, and painfully, exceeds what the funding will allow. **The 4 or 5 women who are assaulted every night are victimized yet again if we can do nothing to help them.**

Sex workers are often judged, ostracized, and denied rights or services, yet they are also routinely made victims of violence. That violence will become systemic if those who could help are unaware of the scope of the problem, or are unable to assist with it.

There are ways you can help the most vulnerable. If you would like to support this project please contact us at info@streethealth.ca.

As Amy Muli, panellist from the Bad Date Coalition states, "It is a worker's right to go to work and not get murdered on the job."

If you or your agency would like a copy of the Safer Stroll Project Documentary, please contact our office.

STREET HEALTH EXPERIENCE HAS SHAPED MY FUTURE

by Vicky Nuguyen

My name is Vicky Nuguyen and I am a second year medical student currently working with Street Health on a project to understand social exclusion as a determinant of community health. I chose Street Health because they were able to give me the opportunity to work with elders living alone in poverty. My experience at Street Health working with people in extreme poverty has undoubtedly shaped the kind of doctor I hope to be.

I have learned that much of the success of Street Health is owing to the way they reach out to clients in their own environment – on the street, in drop-in centres and shelters and even in a client's home. The mandate of Street Health is to "provide care and compassion in a non-judgmental way". I witnessed how each nurse and outreach worker interacts with their clients in a patient and friendly way. Many are on a first

name basis with the men and women on the streets around the agency. They greet each other as trusted friends when passing by. At the nursing clinics Street Health registered nurses care for clients, many who would not seek help from any other provider. Street Health is successful because the nurses are highly mobile, ready at any time to do a home visit or to serve a client on the street.

Being mobile is often the only way to reach the silent population of elders, living with significant health issues and housing instability. These vulnerable people are often not able to or reluctant to visit health care professionals in their offices. Through my experience I realized that I want to be the kind of physician who takes the time to reach out to people in their own environment. I also found that there is opportunity for a physician to collaborate with community agencies like Street Health in order to provide better health care services.

Thank you so much for this wonderful experience.

WE'RE GETTING A MAKEOVER!

A new website to kick off the next 25 years serving the community! Watch for the launch - May 2012.



BOARD LIST SPRING 2012

EXECUTIVE:

Eleanor Lester – Board Chair
Michael Treuman – Vice Chair
Adam Borovilos – Secretary Treasurer

BOARD MEMBERS:

Jordan Berman
Jill Evans
Scott Goodman
Don Locke
Michelle Mallette
Tara McCarville
Diane Walter

ACTING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR:

Kimberley Ney

StreetHealth

Together We Can Make It Work

338 Dundas Street East, Toronto ON, M5A 2A1
(416) 921-8668

info@streethealth.ca

www.streethealth.ca

